



"IT'S A \$2,000,000 TV CHRISTMAS SPECIAL ABOUT THE POVERTY OF JESUS!"

Opinion

Instruction, Not Sermons'

Editor:

Many years ago, Bishop O'Hern once said, "Our Catholic people need instruction, not sermons." Today, because of lack of proper instructions, Catholics are beginning to make up their own versions of Catholic doctrine, the same as Protestants have been doing for the past four hundred years. A point case is the letter of Eileen A. Maceri (12/11):

First, the writer queries, "Why should an unbaptized infant be barred from the grace and love of God just because a particular ceremony has not been performed." (Emphasis ours). The answer is: the unbaptized infant does not share the divine life of God. It is only when it receives this life through Baptism that it becomes a child of God. Hence, Baptism is not a mere ceremony. It is a divinely instituted sacrament whereby the supernatural life of God lost in the fall is restored to the soul. The stigma of being born into the world without sharing God's life is Original Sin. The stigma is removed when the Divine Life, which we call sanctifying grace, is restored to the soul through Baptism. It is a sacrament which effects what it signifies. It is not a mere symbol or ceremony. The necessity of Baptism is clearly shown from many passages in the Scriptures (John 3/5; Matt. 28/19) and from the universal and constant tradition of the Church (Acts 8/36).

Secondly, the writer states, "I had to think for myself." A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. To "think out" our religion, it may be necessary to have a comprehensive background of Scripture, theology, apologetics, philosophy, patrology, history, liturgy, etc. Even after my ordination I had to think out many things which had been considered in the classroom but which I still had not fully assimilated. Fortunately, because of my six years in a major seminary, I was able to think out the answers and still remain orthodox. The writer states, "Christianity is not a system of theological doctrines and creeds — it is a way of life. We are not God's children by adoption; we are God's true children." The answer is: a way of life must rest upon beliefs. There are many religious and philosophical beliefs in the modern world: Hinduism, Shintoism, Buddhism, Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity. Christians may be Catholic, Greek Orthodox, or Protestant. The Protestant world is divided into more than 450 different sects. Then, there is the atheistic philosophy of communism. Society and the lives of the people of the world are built upon these religious beliefs and philosophical principles.

We are God's children by adoption because only Christ is the Son of God by nature. The rest of us are God's children only when we share God's life and then only because God has willed it that way — hence, by adoption.

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Sisters Send Message

Editor:

Incarnation implies that one becomes enfleshed in the life of

another. For the past ten years, we as a Community have mingled our lives with the lives of many in Brazil for the sake of the kingdom. It is overwhelming to reflect on the love and encouragement that has energized our lives and our mission during this time.

And so, this Christmas of 1974, we ask the Lord's blessing upon our Congregation, our families and friends, upon the people of the Church of Rochester. . . the Lord's blessing be upon you, whose vision of a Christ present in all lands and in all cultures has fructified over these past ten years. Our sincere gratitude to

you, and may your Christmas be gifted with the riches of Christ.

Sisters Barbara, Christel, Ellen, Gilmary, Katherine, Laurel, Loyola, Marilyn, and Mary Ann. Brazil Missions

Letters intended for publication must be addressed to Opinion, Courier-Journal, 67 Chestnut St., Rochester, N.Y. 14604.

They should be no longer than 1 1/2 pages, typed double-spaced, with names and addresses. The paper reserves the right to edit all letters.

Editorial

Christmas 1974

One of the great paradoxes about life on earth is that in the midst of our greatest triumphs we remain vulnerable to despair.

Christmas, God knows it is a welcome day. Indeed, aside from the Resurrection itself it is the most exalted day in Christendom. Intrinsically it is a day without blemish but because we are only human we have unwittingly tainted it.

It is needless to discuss its over-commercialization. There is, however, another flaw in our observance of Christ's birthday that is worth pondering, even as we celebrate. We have somehow managed to exclude many from the feast.

Surely none of us intends starvation in such far-off places as Africa or India. Yet we must be mindful that it exists.

And it is true that we are becoming increasingly conscious of the discrepancy in earthly justice that imprisons some of our brothers in poverty, even in our own area. This is commendable. But we must learn to tie even our most joyous reasons for celebration with the realization that not all are invited to the sharing. We must reduce our extravagances so that resources may spread to more of our brothers and sisters.

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan has asked self-designated days of fast and abstinence. The U.S. Bishops have asked all of us voluntarily to fast two days a week. While such action may be mainly symbolic there is the opportunity, if the machinery of government joins in, to provide more of the sustenance of life to more people everywhere.

These are positive, material ways of helping. There are other areas that need our concern. Psychiatrists long have known that in times of such accentuated festivity as our modern Christmases, those with such mental problems as depression suffer even greater anguish than normal. A reduction in the vanities of the celebration with more effort spent on assisting the lonely would be more akin to Christ's message.

Despite the great inconveniences we Americans are feeling this holiday because of the twin economic terrors of inflation and recession, most of us will manage to afford Christmas. What we cannot afford, as God-fearing people, is to ignore the plight of the really underprivileged, the truly troubled people that God sent to share this planet.

Father James L. Empereur, a Jesuit liturgical scholar, wrote recently that although Christmas is basically a human celebration "there is still room to re-Christianize Christmas . . . in the deepest sense, Christmas is the celebration of what it means to be fully human. Christmas reminds us that God has been luring us on to deeper insight into our own humanity."

So if we are able to avoid complete concentration on the superficial trappings we will be able to search for the true meaning of Christmas. We all know what it is. And we should know where it is — within us, waiting to be found.

Life, Liberty and Law



Nancy Murphy

[This is the third in a series on the Dred Scott decision and contemporary abortion cases.]

If there is one season each year which expresses the pure hope and joy of nature surely it is Spring when the Yashino and Kwanson cherry trees along the Potomac announce rebirth, and their profusion of blossoms bears witness to the continuum of all life.

But there was no such display and no such hope in March 1857 when aging Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney, with a voice that faltered to a raspy whisper at times, read the lengthy Dred Scott decision to a hushed and respectful crowd in the north wing of the Old Capitol Building — the Supreme Court Room. And the nation, experiencing a severe economic depression, awaited this final solution to the nagging slavery problem. Was a Black man free if he could establish residence in a Free State? Would he and his family be free thereafter regardless of residence? Would this freedom constitute citizenship? And what rights would be his with the advent of that citizenship?

Or was he doomed before birth to a life of servitude, a subhuman existence?

Roger Taney, not yet sufficiently removed from the shock of losing both his wife and their last child within a day of each other, was a man of impeccable character. A devout Catholic almost apostolic in demeanor and conduct, in his eighty first year, a man who had freed what slaves he had owned with the exception of those older few whom he retained in order to support them in their final years, he must have suffered painfully from his personal distaste of this majority opinion which he himself had written. But he believed it to be a fair and accurate interpretation of the Constitution of the United States. He based his argument on what he saw as the prevailing public opinion of both the 18th and 19th centuries. And for some puzzling reason he refused to define or describe the words "people" and "citizen" as they are used in the Constitution.

But if his voice seemed vague and inaudible at times, his words did not. They were chillingly clear. Few documents in the history of man can match those words for sheer callousness. Not only was Dred Scott denied citizenship in the state of Missouri, he was denied it also in the United States.

His family and all Blacks were

deliberately excluded from the benefits and privileges extended and guaranteed by our Constitution. In the interpretation of the Taney Court by a 7 to 2 margin no slave was then, nor had he ever been intended, within the clauses of the Constitution, to become an American citizen. On the contrary, the Court decreed that the right to own slaves for use and for profit was "expressly affirmed in the Constitution." Then, going far beyond the plea before them, they declared the Missouri Compromise to be null and void. Slavery could not be excluded from any state or territory. No state could restrict the white man's right to "own that species of property."

The Court repeatedly refused to define vital terms saying "The general words (of the Declaration of Independence) would seem to embrace the whole human family . . . but it is too clear for dispute that the enslaved African race were not intended to be included." Again, "The Constitution does not define what description of persons are intended to be included under these terms or who shall be regarded as a citizen and one of the people (and) no further definition is necessary.

"If persons of the African race were citizens of a state and of the United States they would be entitled to all of the privileges and immunities in every state, and the state could not restrict them; for they would then hold these privileges and immunities under the paramount authority of the federal government, and the courts would be bound to maintain and enforce them . . . but (the clauses of the Constitution) pledge themselves to maintain and uphold the right of the master."

The Blacks would be "dangerous to the peace and safety of a large portion of the Union."

The courts must "guard and protect the owner in his rights . . ."

The Black is "altogether unfit to associate with the white race, so far inferior that he has no rights which the white man is bound to respect; the Negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit . . . (he is) an ordinary piece of merchandise and traffic . . . He can be bought and sold whenever a profit can be made from it."

And thus America solved her problem.

The Black man was simply defined out of the Constitution. And the dehumanization of an entire class of people became the law of the land. Slavery on demand. No Black could ever become a citizen. He had no rights. And even if emancipated, he was not and could not become a free man. Not created equal, he was forever excluded from those whom this nation declared to be endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.

And all because of prevailing social opinion.

(Documentation available on request.)